

Understanding Third Graders' Development

Most third graders are 8-9 years old. The concept of an independent self is developing, which often puts third graders asserting their individuality in conflict with others. Third graders are ambitious and enthusiastic, but often overestimate their own abilities. Busy third graders are usually hungry. And though they tend to like school, recess is often the favorite part of the school day.

What They Learn

Third graders are growing in their understanding of what it means to be a good reader. Third graders learn more about different book genres and print formats and how to summarize and organize their thoughts about what they've read. They are also very interested in understanding the reasons things happen and want to discuss the things they've learned about. Third graders are still building their vocabularies through listening—particularly the fine distinctions between closely related words. That's why spending lots of time reading aloud—and talking about what you've read—is so important!

What you should know about third graders

There's a lot of variation in the pace at which kids develop throughout third grade. Communication skills are closely tied to and affected by cognitive, social, and emotional development, so it is important to be aware of how your student mentee is growing and developing.

Developmental Milestones	Implications for Reading Mentors
Physical development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High energy; often hurrying• Enjoy rough and tumble games, as well as team sports; may be physically daring and play hard• Fine motor skills showing increased speed and smoothness• Enjoy testing muscle strength and skills• Large differences in size and abilities of children; may affect the way they get along with others and how they feel about themselves	Physical development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take movement breaks for some physical activity (even if just pausing to stretch during your mentoring sessions).• When writing or drawing, give your student plenty of time. Explain that it is okay if drafts or practice is not their neatest work.
Cognitive development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are learning to see books as sources of information; reading may become a major interest• Developing a longer attention span	Cognitive development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break down any projects into manageable parts. Keep things short and don't insist on finishing a book or project.

- Enjoy collecting, organizing, and classifying objects and information
- Enjoy imaginative play in the form of skits, plays, and puppet shows
- Likes groups and group activities
- Speaking and listening vocabularies are expanding rapidly; talkative and tend to exaggerate
- Increased problem-solving ability and interest in how things work
- Learning to plan ahead and evaluate what they do
- May respond to suggestions with, “That’s dumb” or “I don’t want to do that.”
- Beginning to see and understand the perspectives of others.
- Listen well, but are so full of ideas that recall is not great

- Share tall tales and stories with characters who exaggerate. Encourage your student to write a tall tale or poem using exaggeration.
- Students may ask to include a friend or another reading pair in your session together. Remind you student that Power Lunch is time set aside for just the two of you.
- Your student will respond better to doing things together than to “just talking.” Take turns telling stories about real and imaginary events, talking about your week and their week–what happened, what was surprising, what was funny. Also try making up stories together and writing them down.
- Read aloud books from a variety of genres. Provide opportunities for your student to share his/her enthusiasm for a book through writing a book recommendation.
- Have fun with homonyms. Talk about how jam is something you put on toast as well as cars stuck in traffic. How many other homonyms can your student think of?

Social and emotional development

- Begin to define self based on certain attributes or achievements, such as “I wear glasses,” etc.
- Can become self-conscious based on how they believe they look to others
- Establishing friendships is very important, although they may lack skills to do so; may have a best friend
- More dependent on peers than adults
- Often overestimate abilities
- Interested in rules and rituals, but question authority and test limits; very concerned with fairness
- Strong desire to perform well, do things right
- Find criticism and failure difficult to handle
- View things as right or wrong, wonderful or terrible, with little middle ground

Social and emotional development

- Check in with your student about his/her friends. Share some of your own experiences with friends and talk with your student about what it means to be a friend.
- Encourage your student to explore new ways of looking at the world and people through reading about different cultures and customs.
- Point out biographies about people who dealt with issues of fairness and justice.
- Positively reinforce your student’s good qualities and new skill development.
- Your consistent attendance and easy-going attitude help your student see your time together as a fun learning adventure.
- Read jokes to keep things fun and light!

Curricular topic of focus in Third Grade

People, Laws, and Democracy

The Living World: Animal Habitats

Overcoming Adversity: Powerful Characters, Powerful Words

Forces and Magnetism

Washington, DC: It's Right Outside My Door

Good titles to read aloud with Third Graders

It is helpful to read a variety of texts with your third grade student including, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Help your student understand and talk about the main ideas of the books your read.

One Green Apple by Eve Bunting

Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay by Susan Hood

Malala's Magic Pencil by Malala Yousafzai

Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco

Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar

Fantastic Mr. Fox by Roald Dah

The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate

Elijah of Buxton by Christopher Paul Curtis

Geronimo Stilton series by Geronimo Stilton

The Name of This Book Is Secret series by Pseudonymous Bosch

Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein

Bravo! Poems About Amazing Hispanics by Margarita Engle

El Deafo by Cece Bell

Big Nate series by Lincoln Peirce

Other recommended books to choose from:

[Great Read Alouds for Third Graders](#) booklist from Reading Rockets

[The Best 3rd Grade Books to Share With Your Students](#) from We Are Teachers